

## **CONFERENCE REPORT**

### **‘Lifelong Learning in Developing Countries’ Conference West Bengal, India, 17-19 February**

**Apurba Chattopadhyaya**  
*Government of West Bengal*

A 2-day International Conference, ‘Lifelong Learning in Developing Countries: Issues and Perspectives’, was organized by Kalyani University of West Bengal, India, on 17-19 February, 2017. The conference was attended by experts from U.S.A, Denmark, Malta, Norway and India. After the conference, the experts participated in a workshop in which a comprehensive curriculum for an MA in Lifelong Learning, to be offered by Kalyani University, was developed.

The conference was inaugurated by the Kalyani University Vice-Chancellor Prof. Sankar Kumar Ghosh. In his address, he emphasized the need for lifelong learning in India. He urged the participants to incorporate programmes for the superannuated too, since many of them had time and interest for learning an occupation of their choice.

The keynote address was delivered by Prof. Peter Mayo of the University of Malta. Prof Mayo tracked the development of the concept from the broad humanistic concept of lifelong education to the narrowly economic version of lifelong learning being promoted presently. He argued that for lifelong learning to genuinely serve its professed purpose, it needed to be holistic in the sense of being bio-centric in scope and purpose, recuperating the spirit of the old broad humanistic UNESCO literature. He then provided an historical account of this transformation.

Prof. Margaret Ledwith, Emeritus Professor at the University of Cumbria, who could not attend the conference physically, had sent her address which was read out by Prof. Asoke Bhattacharya, a leading member of the Organising Committee. Prof. Ledwith described, in her address, the role of community development which, she maintained, was a form of adult education in the community rooted in the pedagogy of Paulo Freire. Its intention was to bring about change for social justice, for a fair, just and environmentally sustainable future. Arguing that that neo-liberalism was a politics of greed over need, she warned the participants of the danger of neo-liberalism which was polluting the very concept of lifelong learning.

Prof. V.Reghu from Kerala University informed the audience of the successful implementation of primary education in the state of Kerala. He stated that lifelong learning was being successfully implemented there.

The welcome address was delivered by Prof. Prasenjit Deb, Head of the Department of Lifelong Learning and Adult Education at the University of Kalyani.

In the plenary sessions the experts from various countries presented their papers. This included Prof. Anders Holm of the University of Copenhagen, who spoke on Grundtvig's contribution to adult education; and Dr. Synnove Sakura Heggem from Norway, who also spoke on Grundtvig's contribution in the field of lifelong learning. She gave the examples of Grundtvig's heart-rhetorics. Dr.Marilyn Wilhelm from the United States, the founder of Wilhelm International school, spoke about education which provides a healing touch to the community.

Rev. Mette Geil of Denmark spoke of the first folk high school which was established in 1844. It was established with Grundtvig's inspiration and is still continuing its work in the field of lifelong learning. Prof. Brad Busbee, Head of the Department of English of the University of Samford, U.S.A., spoke about Grundtvig's use of Nordic Mythology and its relevance to lifelong learning. Other speakers included Prof. Adi Narayan Reddy, Head of the Department of Adult, Continuing Education and Extension, of S.V.University of Tirupati, Andhra Pradesh.

The workshop that followed was co-ordinated by Prof. Asoke Bhattacharya of Jadavpur University and Prof. Prasenjit Deb, Head of the of the Department of Lifelong Learning and Adult Education of Kalyani University. Prof Peter Mayo, with his vast knowledge and expertise on lifelong learning, guided the coordinators ably throughout the session. A comprehensive curriculum for the MA in Lifelong Learning was the outcome of the workshop.

Around 160 papers were presented in the conference.

The University arranged cultural programmes in the evening and sight-seeing tours at the end of the conference.

*Retired Joint Director,  
Department of Information & Cultural Affairs,  
Government of West Bengal*